DALLAS ART FAIR’S 15TH EDITION

NASHER PRIZE LAUREATE
Senga Nengudi

Cerámica Suro at
DALLAS CONTEMPORARY

TACA’S TOP HONORS
t will not be the first time that José Noé Suro comes to Dallas. But before this, on an ordinary street in the zona industrial of Guadalajara, a ceramic factory’s facade rises, composed of colorful handmade tiles designed by Jorge Pardo in sunset shades. Inside, off to one side in the warren of productivity that proliferates glazes and forms, a visiting artist comes for a week- or month-long residency. Suro, a mastermind of generosity and connection, took over the family factory from his father and, beginning in 1994, added artist collaborations to the roster of luxury hotel ceramic ware. Now, it is, in many ways, a place of dreams.

A ten-minute walk away, Los Angeles-born Eduardo Sarabia, who first came to the city for a residency, creates in a several-story studio big enough to hold his large-scale work.

If Guadalajara has been on the ascendancy in the art world for the last several years, if it hosts an intimate and transcendent art fair the week before Mexico City’s, it is largely due to the efforts of Suro, who, along with his wife, Marcela, is himself a collector.

The show that will run at the Dallas Contemporary April to December, Cerámica Suro: A Story of Collaboration, Production, and Collecting in the Contemporary Arts, represents 20 to 25 percent of Suro’s personal collection, alongside a solo, immersive exhibition by Sarabia titled This Is the Place. Between the two, the institution delivers a rare gem.

Viviana Kuri, director of the Museo de Arte Zapopan (MAZ) only a few miles outside Guadalajara, had wanted to hold a solo show of Suro’s collection—which he began in his early 20s with few funds...
and expanded with the factory—for 15 years when she brought it to MAZ in May 2022. This show and the Dallas Contemporary’s will vary in minor ways.

There, in the land of jacaranda trees, a courtyard held the molds that had created some of the work, and shelves mimicked the racks that hold unfired ceramics at the factory. In Dallas, where the Suro and Sarabia shows are Carolina Alvarez Mathies’ first exhibitions as director of Dallas Contemporary, a room in the back will display design pieces not exhibited at MAZ, such as lamps and the numerous table settings Suro has developed for acclaimed restaurants, while pedestals wrap around in sinuous shapes.

What is special in the Suro collection is the way it has grown around a symbiotic model and works that are often the offshoots of residencies and relationships, each unique as the rapport, born of the fizz around the possibilities of the medium.

“It’s a very special place that makes all these liaisons with the artists. He’s an accomplice with [them], and that’s extraordinary,” Kuri says of Suro. “Whenever an artist comes, they obviously do something in ceramic, and they can do it in an incredible way. That is why it is so special a collection—because it is made of this solidarity. So it’s a collection that’s not made out of money.”

Eduardo Sarabia, El Toro y Otras Relatos, 2019, Museo Universitario del Chopo UNAM, Mexico City, Mexico.

Eduardo Sarabia, Ceiba con aves I, 2022, fiberglass, metal, leather, clay, ceramic, resin, enamel, acrylic paint, 60.62 x 39.37 x 25.62 in.
This gathering that infuses a traditional medium with contemporary ideas and explores its idiosyncratic possibilities is a chance to see artists working in ceramics who might not usually.

You will see the platinum-luster fornicating dogs of artist and filmmaker Miguel Calderón. The juicy, delectable red tomato of Jorge Pardo. The jubilant, dancing geometric forms of Marcel Dzama. There is also photography, painting, and works on paper.

“It’s possible that there’s another way to collect,” Suro says. “I think a collection entails a story, and my collection is a story of friendship and collaboration. I love that 90 percent of the artists in my collection are my friends. It’s not the narrative of the white big painters. There are many universes.”

Meanwhile, in an unprecedented and yet wholly representative show, Sarabia spins other tales. The Mexican American artist with roots in the Chicano neighborhood of Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles is famous for taking traditional crafts like ceramics and glassblowing and harnessing them for cross-border, geopolitical, and social commentary. The decorative whorls of blue-and-white Talavera vases prominently display pinup girls and marijuana leaves. Hand-painted packing boxes emblazoned with images of Mexican goods make wry visual comments on migration and the economics of exchange.

“My medium is narrative. It’s storytelling,” Sarabia says. Here, he’s dreamed up a hacienda and filled it with projects of a more personal nature, unsuited to non-oneiric, tightly thematic shows. A home full of “things that exist in my world that I don’t get to show.”
“Every hacienda has a courtyard,” he says. His boasts ceramic birds, a massive fountain, and leaves sprawled in a curling vegetal cursive across the walls. In Mexico, on visits to his parents’ Sinaloan families during summers, “I loved the richness of this culture,” he says, while in the Chicano murals of Boyle Heights, “everything had these secret symbols.” Find the motifs of coins or chess—all are meaningful to him.

Every hacienda has a kitchen, hence this one’s table for the 18-place dinnerware set Sarabia has been making to entertain friends. In the bar, hand-blown glass tequila jugs, whimsically lettered with enamel paint like retro signs. In the living room, paintings based on personal portraits and travel photos. In the chapel, stained-glass windows telling of shaman quests in the Yucatan, quetzal bird reveries, and other magical worlds.

It is a treasure trove of craft, a palimpsest of references, a menagerie of memories, like a personal lexicon writ large. Or, as he says, like pressing life “through my filter of this East LA, cholo, baseball fan, ceramicist, painter…and see what happens: It becomes its own myth.”

Sarabia’s show is titled *This Must Be the Place*. The name is fitting. This is true of Guadalajara; true of Dallas. “Part of my work is dreaming,” Sarabia says to me as we sit on the rooftop terrace of his studio in Guadalajara. Alvarez Mathies also suggests that to have this Mexican collector and Mexican American artist here, to, “give this space to Latin America,” is itself a coup of daydreams. Which is how the Dallas Contemporary, too, became a place of dreams.